

Obama presses Trump not to back away from clean energy

9 January 2017, by Josh Lederman

President Barack Obama cast the adoption of clean energy in the U.S. as "irreversible," putting pressure Monday on President-elect Donald Trump not to back away from a core strategy to fight climate change.

Obama, penning an opinion article in the journal *Science*, sought to frame the argument in a way that might appeal to the president-elect: in economic terms. He said the fact that the cost and polluting power of energy have dropped at the same time proves that fighting climate change and spurring economic growth aren't mutually exclusive.

"Despite the policy uncertainty that we face, I remain convinced that no country is better suited to confront the climate challenge and reap the economic benefits of a low-carbon future than the United States," Obama wrote.

He peppered his article with subtle references to Trump, noting that the debate about future climate policy was "very much on display during the current presidential transition."

As he prepares to transfer power to Trump, Obama has turned to an unusual format to make his case to Trump to preserve his policies: academic journals. In the last week, Obama also published articles under his name in the *Harvard Law Review* about his efforts on criminal justice reform and in the *New England Journal of Medicine* defending his health care law, which Republicans are poised to repeal.

The articles reflect an effort by Obama to pre-empt the arguments Trump or Republicans are likely to employ as they work to roll back Obama's key accomplishments in the coming years. Yet it's unclear whether Trump or the GOP could be swayed by scholarly arguments in relatively obscure publications.

Secretary of State John Kerry, one of Obama's top allies on climate change, echoed the president in a speech Monday at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Kerry said the answers to climate change are relatively straightforward and depend on the U.S. relying on cleaner sources like solar, wind, biomass and nuclear energy, but added that he didn't know what policies Trump and the next secretary of state would pursue.

"In the time I've spent in public life, one of the things I've learned is that some issues look a lot different when you're actually in office compared to when you're on the campaign trail," Kerry said. "The truth is that climate change shouldn't be a partisan issue. It's an issue that all of us should care about, regardless of political affiliation."

During the campaign, Trump vowed to reinvigorate the U.S. coal industry and dismantle Obama regulations targeting coal-fired power plants. More recently, he's suggested he's keeping an open mind about climate change and about whether he'll pull the U.S. out of the global emissions-cutting deal struck in Paris in 2015 that Obama helped broker.

In *Science*, Obama argued that as the cost of clean energy sources drop, businesses are independently coming to the conclusion that it makes financial sense to wean themselves off of coal and other dirtier fuels. He also said that if Trump pulls out of the Paris agreement, the U.S. would "lose its seat at the table" on global climate policy.

Obama said a key advantage of the U.S. political system is that each president determines his or her own policies.

"President-elect Donald Trump will have the opportunity to do so," Obama wrote. "The latest science and economics provide a helpful guide for what the future may bring."

More information: "The irreversible momentum of clean energy," by Barack Obama, President of the United States,
[dx.doi.org/10.1126/science.aam6284](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aam6284)

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